

No, Again, to Mr. Reagan's War

For the United States to underwrite an armed rebellion in Nicaragua offends law, decency and sense. The non-intervention that President Reagan preaches to the Sandinista regime is mocked by his practice. From its inception two years ago, Mr. Reagan's war has been dishonestly defended as an attempt to halt Nicaragua's arms aid to leftist guerrillas in El Salvador. That aim cannot be reconciled with sabotage raids against Nicaragua's oil refineries and airfields, all apparently carried out with the C.I.A.'s assistance.

It was not love for the Sandinistas but concern for American honor that caused the House last July to reject funding for the "secret" war, by a vote of 228 to 195. Every argument made then is more valid today when the House again votes on a no-longer-secret war — to be followed by a Senate vote next week. The case against United States sponsorship of the "contra" army is even stronger now.

As the war widens, so does the threat to the

stability of neutral and unarmed Costa Rica, whose territory has been a base for the rebel forces. That was the plain message to the Kissinger panel when it visited Central America's only flourishing democracy last week. And instead of weakening Managua's leftist regime, the blatant American promotion of the rebels has allowed the Sandinistas to mask their ugly repression with the slogans of wartime nationalism.

The Administration wants principles so elastic that they lose their value everywhere. If this is held to be the only way to "negotiate" with Nicaragua, what becomes of the case against foreign intervention not only in Salvador but also Lebanon and Afghanistan and Cambodia? And what of the Korean airliner episode, in which Mr. Reagan spared no words condemning the Soviet Union for an excessive use of force, in violation of accepted international norms? How does it punish the Russians to emulate them in Nicaragua?